

Perspectives and Challenges of Women Political Participation in India: A Study of Lok Sabha Elections From 1952 to 2024

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Abstract

The present study examines the crucial role women play in Indian politics and their efforts that promote peace. The study explores the various facets of women's political participation, looking at their roles in grassroots politics as well as their participation in governance organizations. In order to comprehend the particular perspectives and challenges experienced by women in this situation, the study begins with a historical summary of the political participation of women in India. By tracing historical trends and analysing data from Lok Sabha elections spanning from 1952 to 2024, the study elucidates the challenges and opportunities encountered by women in Indian politics. This covers social conventions, lack of access to education and resources, and the social structure of the country. The paper also looks at how legislative and policy frameworks can increase women's political engagement, analysing the advantages and disadvantages of such initiatives. Additionally, the study intends to offer insightful information Lok Sabha representation and their political equality and governmental initiatives for equal opportunity.

Keywords: Women in India, Political Participation, Lok Sabha Elections, Gender Equality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political participation is the act of freely engaging in various political activities to impact public policy, decision-making processes, petitions, and election voting (Longley, 2021). It refers to pursuing the acquisition of authority and decision-making to shape public policy to serve one's own or the group's interests. During the 1940s and 1950s, political engagement was largely limited to campaigning activities and was believed to include casting a ballot in elections (Deth, 2001). Additionally, in the modern era, voices from all over the world are advocating for women's participation in politics. The advantages of gender equality draw the attention of governments and international leaders. Women who occupy local or national political office typically work more effectively to address issues that affect the general public, such as the provision of clean drinking water, village-to-village transportation, and other village-level amenities (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004).

Furthermore, a complex web of historical occurrences and societal shifts has shaped India's path toward gender equality and women's political engagement. Women have had a significant influence on the political climate of the country from before independence to the twenty-first century. This paper explores the historical trajectory of women's political participation in India, charting the changes in their responsibilities and rights throughout time.

Women in India since ancient times have had a long history of struggles and suffering. In the Vedic period, there was some sort of respect and equality for women. The predominance of the purdah regime, child marriage, and other issues made women's status unsatisfactory throughout the Mughal era in India. Some women did, nevertheless, have a sizable political following at the time. A notable example of a woman who championed women's empowerment during her time is Raziya Sultan (Gabbay, 2011). Another such woman is Nur Jahan, who only granted land under her seal, demonstrating the active involvement and deference that men showed for women (Findly, 1993). Moreover, the social reform movement and the religious reform movement of the country included a number of notable women reformers. A few notable individuals are Pandit Ramabai, Manorama Majumdar, Sarala Devi Goshal, who founded Bhara-ta Stree Mahamandal for women's education, and Swarna Kumari Devi, who founded the women's group Sakhi Samiti in 1886 for widows (Asthana, 1974). These activities gained momentum for women's participation in public areas, paving the way for them to join the independence movement. Swarna Kumari Devi, one of the two delegates selected from Bengal to represent the state at the 1890 Congress session, serves as a prime example. Numerous women's groups, including Mahila Shilpa Samithi and Bharat Stri Mahamandal, founded in 1910 by Sarala Devi Chaudharani, the first All India Women's organization called "The Bharat Stree Mahamandal," were founded as a result of the Swadeshi movement. Women's engagement in the Civil Disobedience Movement was initially minimal, but once the barriers to participation were lifted, this was the only movement in which women's participation peaked. Women began to form groups, such as the Congress Working Committee (CWC). Leading ladies included Hansa Mehta, Durga Bhai Deshmukh, Sarojini Naidu, and others (Kumar, 1993). Since the Indian Constitution is founded on the principle of equality, which is guaranteed to all citizens of the nation, it guarantees equality before the law as well as equal protection under the law. Protection for women has been extended to all fields. Men and women have the right to equality under articles 14 through 18 of the constitution's fundamental rights.

2. Representation of Women in India's Parliament

In 2024 general election, the 74 newly elected female MPs, 43 are first-time in Parliament, including Misa Bharti of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and Kangana Ranaut of the Bharatiya Janata Party. There have also been several young female candidates elected to the Lok Sabha, with ages between from 25 to 30. Priyanka Jarkiholi from Chikkodi in Karnataka, Sanjna Jatav of the Indian National Congress from Bharatpur in Rajasthan, Shambhavi Choudhary of the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) from Samastipur in Bihar, and Iqra Choudhary and Priya Saroj of the Samajwadi Party, who represent Kairana and Machhlishahr in Uttar Pradesh, respectively. Additionally, In the general elections of 2024, female MPs will represent 14 political parties in the Lok Sabha. The BJP is the most represented party with 31 female MPs, followed by the Congress with 13. The All-India Trinamool Congress has eleven female lawmakers, while the Samajwadi Party only has five. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has three, compared to two for the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) and the Janata Dal (United). However, each of the seven other parties has one female MP. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections saw a high turnout of female voters in some states and Union Territories.

This study considers states with a minimum of five parliamentary constituencies. Assam, which has 14 parliamentary constituencies, had the highest turnout, with 81.71 percent of the vote for women. Significant female electoral involvement was also demonstrated by Andhra Pradesh, which has 25 constituencies, with an 80.3 percent turnout. West Bengal, with 42 constituencies, ranked second with

80.18 percent. Odisha ranked fourth with a female voter turnout of 75.55 percent. Even in Chhattisgarh, which has only 11 parliamentary seats, women's vote participation was impressive, at 72.23 percent (Tiwari, 2024).

The proportion of women in Lok Sabha has risen from 5 percent in the first Lok Sabha to 14 percent in the contemporary Lok Sabha. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023 was presented in Lok Sabha on September 19, 2023. The Bill aimed to provide 33 percent of all seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women. A comparable bill was presented in the Rajya Sabha in 2008 and was approved by the House after two years. It expired once the 14th Lok Sabha was dissolved in 2014. This note examined the involvement of women in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. In these context, 74 women are serving as Members of Parliament in the current Lok Sabha. If the Women's Reservation Bill would work, the count of women in the upcoming election would rise to 180. The number of female Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Rajya Sabha will go up from 29 to 81 (Wire, Sep-2023).

Table:1

Proportion of Women MPs in Lok Sabha from 1951-52 to 2024				
Year	Number Lok Sabha	Seat won by women	percentage	Total seats of Lok Sabha
1951-52	1 st Lok Sabha	22	4.5%	489
1957	2 nd Lok Sabha	22	4.5%	505
1962	3 rd Lok Sabha	31	5.6%	508
1967	4 th Lok Sabha	29	5.4%	523
1971	5 th Lok Sabha	28	5.4%	521
1977	6 th Lok Sabha	10	3.5%	544
1980	7 th Lok Sabha	28	5.3%	544
1984	8 th Lok Sabha	43	8.0%	531
1989	9 th Lok Sabha	29	5.5%	516
1991	10 th Lok Sabha	39	7.3%	523
1996	11 th Lok Sabha	40	7.3%	545
1998	12 th Lok Sabha	43	7.9%	545
1999	13 th Lok Sabha	49	9.0%	545
2004	14 th Lok Sabha	45	8.0%	545
2009	15 th Lok Sabha	59	10.9%	545
2014	16 th Lok Sabha	66	10.9%	545
2019	17 th Lok Sabha	81	14.9%	545
2024	18 th Lok Sabha	74	13.6%	545

Source: (compiled by the data from Election Commission of India 2021).

The above table shows that the evolution of female representation in the Lok Sabha from 1951-52 to 2024. Women initially occupied 4.5 percent of seats, which increased steadily to 13.6 percent in the 17th Lok Sabha. High points in representation were observed during sessions such as the 8th Lok Sabha in 1984 and the 13th Lok Sabha in 1999. In recent sessions, including the 15th and 16th Lok Sabha, women

occupied 10.9 percent of seats, indicating a favorable shift towards increased gender diversity in India's lower house of Parliament.

3. Perspectives and Challenges of Women Political Participation

Due to the limitations on their mobility, which are more prevalent in rural than in urban regions, women in rural areas do not actively participate in politics outside of voting because they are expected to take care of their families. The socially manufactured belief that women have weak bodies and are incapable of making independent, thoughtful decisions limits their place in society. The low number of women in politics is also a result of cultural norms (Arshad et al., 2010). Furthermore, because men are seen as the only ones who can support their families and women as the caregivers for home duties, especially in rural regions, women are viewed as followers rather than leaders and have the authority to make decisions (Sadie, 2005).

Table: 2

Total number of male and female candidates in Lok Sabha from 1951-52 to 2024				
Year	Men	Women	Total Candidates	Difference in numbers
1951	1825	22	1874	1803
1957	1474	45	1519	1429
1962	1919	66	1985	1853
1967	2302	67	2369	2235
1971	2701	83	2784	2618
1977	2369	70	2439	2299
1980	4486	143	4629	4343
1984	5150	162	5312	4988
1989	5962	198	6160	5764
1991	8342	326	8668	8016
1996	13353	599	13952	12754
1998	4476	274	4750	4202
1999	4364	284	4648	4080
2004	5080	355	5435	4725
2009	7514	556	8070	6958
2014	7577	668	8251	6909
2019	7322	726	8050	6596
2024	7553	800	8359	6753

Source: (compiled by the data from Election Commission of India 2021).

The above table shows that the number of male and female candidates differs significantly. Out of all candidates, there are just 2.96 percent of female candidates and 97 percent of male candidates.

4. Discussions

The discussion on women's participation in politics in India highlights numerous barriers rooted in cultural traditions, societal norms, and systemic difficulties. Despite significant progress in other fields, the

representation of women in political leadership remains significantly lower than that of men. The lack of representation is not just due to human choices but also a result of broader institutional inequalities. Poverty greatly hinders women's involvement in politics. Women's ability to obtain necessary resources for political involvement, such as education, networking opportunities, and financial support for campaigns, is limited by economic hardship. Traditional gender stereotypes, deeply ingrained in culture, limit women to household responsibilities and diminish their perceived ability to hold political leadership posts. Women in politics have additional challenges due to the prevalence of physical power and proxy politics. Proxy politics is a method of upholding patriarchal dominance by symbolically giving women positions of power without actually giving them real agency or decision-making power, creating a false sense of representation. Moreover, women experience a disproportionate level of coercion and intimidation, creating an environment of fear and insecurity that hinders their ability to engage openly in discussions about politics.

5. Conclusion

India's women's political engagement has many obstacles that must be addressed holistically. Community knowledge and sensitization about gender equality are essential to combating patriarchal practices and myths. Creating supportive networks and giving training and mentorship can help women navigate politics. Additionally, laws that give women elected to public office real decision-making power. Protecting women's rights and enabling their political participation require strict enforcement of intimidation and assault laws. Technology and innovation can also increase women's political participation through online discussion forums and virtual town halls. Technology can help women participate in politics and amplify their voices, making democracy more inclusive and representative. Government, public society, and the commercial sector must work together to remove political hurdles for women. India can maximize the potential of its varied people and develop its democratic institutions for all citizens by eliminating systematic disparities and promoting gender equality.

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